



DOWNTOWN HEIGHT AND DENSITY REVIEW

for the
City of Seattle
by the
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
1.0 INTRODUCTION	
1.1 Terms of Reference	1
1.2 Tour of Vancouver	2
1.3 Meetings in Seattle	2
1.4 Review of Information	3
1.5 Seattle's Goals and Objectives	3
1.6 Review of Emerging Issues	4
1.7 Seattle and Vancouver	4
1.8 Depth of Review	4
2.0 EVALUATION OF EXECUTIVE PROPOSAL	
2.1 The Executive Proposal and Guiding Principles	5
2.1.1 Consistency with the Seattle Comprehensive Plan and Adopted Neighborhood Plans	5
2.1.2 Integration of Adjacent Neighborhoods and Urban Centers with the Downtown Urban Center	6
2.1.3 Provision of Sufficient Housing Capacity	6
2.1.4 Optimization of Use of Transportation Infrastructure	6
2.1.5 Region-wide Sprawl Reduction	7
2.1.6 Promotion of Sustainable Development Practices	7
2.1.7 Promotion of Historic Preservation	8
2.1.8 Maintenance and Promotion of Aesthetics in Design and Urban Form	10
2.1.9 Provision of Public Open Space and Urban Recreational Opportunities	10
2.1.10 Provision of Sufficient Employment Capacity	10

DOWNTOWN SEATTLE HEIGHT AND DENSITY REVIEW

2.2	Summary	11
2.3	Exploring Other Issues	12
2.3.1	DISCUSSION ONE	12
	Are the goals of increasing the capacity of Downtown for housing and obtaining more affordable housing met?	
	Will the plan provide for more people living Downtown in vibrant healthy neighborhoods?	
	RECOMMENDATIONS	15
2.3.2	DISCUSSION TWO	16
	Are the bonus provisions included in the plan adequate for the needs of the emerging downtown? Do the bonus provisions adequately share in the profits to be generated from the increased densities and heights?	
	RECOMMENDATION	17
2.3.3	DISCUSSION THREE	18
	How different will Downtown appear as a result of the new regulations?	
	RECOMMENDATIONS	19
2.3.4	DISCUSSION FOUR	20
	How will new and existing residents be involved in the development of specific neighborhood plans? How will they be involved in monitoring the new areas as they develop and help implement adjustments?	
	RECOMMENDATION	20
3.0	CONCLUSION	20
 Appendix A: Documents List		
Appendix B: Contacts List		
Appendix C: Summary of Recommendations		

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Seattle and Vancouver are neighbours and our citizens admire much of what they see in each other's city. We have been invited by the City of Seattle to offer independent advice on Mayor Greg Nickels' proposal, now being reviewed by City Council, to reshape the pattern of development in Downtown Seattle and to secure public benefits that are essential to a vibrant, growing city. The invitation came because we have played leadership roles in Vancouver, and our perspective may offer cues helpful to Seattle. Experience has shown that such dialogue between our two cities is very helpful for us both in our mutual quest to be great cities.

Conceiving and building contemporary cities requires collaboration. Government, the development industry and citizens from all walks of life must work together to find that fine balance between economic opportunity, community quality and an inclusive process that works for their city and will appeal to most people. This clearly guides the way Seattle works and it also guides the way that we work. We see that the Mayor's proposal is offered in this spirit. We see that it has been received and is being reviewed by the City Council in this same spirit. And we also see our role echoing this spirit.

While there is energetic debate about specifics, the people of Seattle seem to have a strong consensus about the future of their city center. It is seen as intensively developed, mixed-use, rich in heritage and culture, connected, comfortably livable and carefully planned and governed. The Mayor's proposal manifests these themes. The Council contributions to that proposal no doubt will reinforce these themes.

In this respect, our job is clear because these same themes represent the strong consensus for growth in Vancouver and we have long been immersed in the ways and means to achieve this kind of city. As you read our summary evaluation and suggestions, be confident that we understand your struggle, we empathize with your management approach and we truly appreciate your vision. That's why we think our advice will augment your debate on this proposal. We also think that debate will help to ensure that Seattle continues to develop as one of the most livable cities.

1.1 TERMS OF REFERENCE

In mid-June 2005, after several weeks of exploratory discussions, the Legislative Department of the City of Seattle contracted with Ray Spaxman (^{The} Spaxman Consulting Group Ltd.) and Larry Beasley to undertake a review of the Executive Proposal

DOWNTOWN SEATTLE HEIGHT AND DENSITY REVIEW

recommending changes to Downtown height and density as transmitted to City Council on June 7, 2005.

The scope of work consists of a five-step program.

Step One: Background preparation – Review of documentation from Seattle.

Step Two: Consultants lead tour and discussions of Downtown Vancouver with Seattle representatives.

Step Three: Consultants tour Downtown Seattle and meet City officials and community representatives.

Step Four: Prepare and submit draft for review followed by final report.

Step Five: Presentation of the findings to Seattle City Council and community.

1.2 TOUR OF VANCOUVER

On May 27th, Councilmembers Steinbrueck, Godden and Rasmussen together with Legislative Assistants Freeman, Herzfeld and Powers toured Downtown Vancouver in the company of and assisted by Larry Beasley and Ray Spaxman. The tour included the West End, Coal Harbour, False Creek, Yaletown, Downtown and Downtown South. Particular attention was given to the various heights and densities, the design guidelines, and review and approval processes and incentives utilized in Vancouver.

At the end of the day we met to discuss what had been seen and how that might relate to the height/density bonus proposal.

1.3 MEETINGS IN SEATTLE

On June 23rd Larry Beasley and Ray Spaxman toured Downtown Seattle and adjacent neighbourhoods in the company of and assisted by Councilmember Steinbrueck and support staff. The tour was followed by a series of meetings with representatives of the Mayor's Office, the Planning and Development Department, the Office of Housing, and the Law Department. Councilmember Rasmussen attended for part of the time.

June 24th was spent meeting several community representatives including, "People for Puget Sound", "Transportation Choices", "Historic Seattle", "Downtown Seattle Association", and the "Housing Development Consortium".

These were followed by three meetings with the press. The first was with the Daily

DOWNTOWN SEATTLE HEIGHT AND DENSITY REVIEW

Journal of Commerce, the second with the Seattle Post-Intelligencer and the third in Vancouver with Phillip Dawdy of the Seattle Weekly.

1.4 REVIEW OF INFORMATION

The 24 principal documents that were reviewed are listed in *Appendix A*. They ranged in complexity from pamphlets, such as “Shaping Downtown Seattle”, published by the Department of Planning and Development to give a quick and accessible overview of the main objectives and contents of the proposal, through an increasingly complex set of documents to the proposed Ordinance itself, transmitted to Council on June 7, 2005 by Mayor Greg Nickels.

1.5 SEATTLE’S GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goals and objectives of the height/density bonus proposal are set out in a variety of ways in the many documents referred to. We searched through all the documents for statements of intentions, goals and objectives so that we would be clear about what the proposal is all about. We found that they all draw on the seven key objectives set out well in the comprehensive document entitled, “Downtown Height and Density Changes - Final Environmental Impact Statement”, dated January 2005. Consequently, we used the following key objectives as the best summary indicators of what Seattle wants to achieve with the height/density bonus proposal.

1. Enhance opportunities for housing development to create a vital mixed-use Downtown environment, reduce sprawl in the region, and protect the city’s existing residential neighborhoods.
2. Accommodate as broad a range of household incomes as possible.
3. Maintain Downtown Seattle as the major regional employment center and concentrate employment growth where it can best be served by transit.
4. Help ensure that added height promotes less bulky development for both residential and non-residential projects.
5. Provide a transition in development intensity and scale between the office core and adjacent neighborhoods.
6. Promote historic preservation.
7. Simplify the Downtown Code.

1.6 REVIEW OF EMERGING ISSUES

We developed our understanding of the height/density bonus proposal through a sequence of reviewing documents and discussions with people involved and knowledgeable about the work. See *Appendix B* for a list of contacts. We firstly sought to obtain a broad knowledge of the proposal and then progressively investigated those subjects where, by reference to the key objectives and our experience in Vancouver, we sensed that additional discussion was needed. Those subjects further developed into the themes that we have reported on and are identified as those areas where we believe refinements could better achieve the objectives.

1.7 SEATTLE AND VANCOUVER

Vancouver and Seattle are kindred cities and we have much to learn from one another. We are good neighbours seeking a good life. We share a similar climate, a similar sized urban conglomeration and the same environmentally sensitive Georgian Basin in the Pacific Northwest. At the same time, we are also different. There are cultural, historic and legislative differences that need to be understood and respected. Our two countries, although similar in many ways, manifest divergent values and community aspirations. Our two urban economies are at different stages of development, and function in dissimilar ways. We don't want our cities to replicate one another but we can positively influence one another. It is in this spirit that we offer our review and comment on this important legislation now proposed for the City of Seattle.

1.8 DEPTH OF REVIEW

In the month or so that we have had to undertake this work, acknowledging we are experts in the field, we have been impressed by the enormous complexity of the height/density bonus proposal. We are also highly impressed by the competence and expertise displayed in the political and professional work that is being done. Our report is not a definitive analysis of the Executive Proposal. There are a number of subjects that are outside of our knowledge. We cannot compare the Comprehensive Plan with the Neighborhood Plans, nor the Downtown Urban Center with the adjacent neighborhoods. Similarly, the regional transportation plans are beyond our terms of reference. As well, neither of us, while frequent visitors to Seattle, has a great familiarity with the detailed structure of the City. However, through an intensive review of the material made available to us, and the discussions with many of the people involved, we have been able to identify directions for discussion, which we think can help to refine the proposal.

2.0 EVALUATION OF EXECUTIVE PROPOSAL

Our terms of reference require us to evaluate the height/density bonus proposal to determine how well it meets Council's Guiding Principles. We have been asked to identify any disparities between the two documents, key areas of concerns and make recommendations for improvements. We have also been asked to comment on any additional matters relevant to the viability and success of Downtown Seattle especially as contrasted with the Vancouver experience.

As our evaluation proceeded we began to identify a number of areas where we believe we can be most helpful in our advice. This section of our report focuses on those matters. Section 2.1 provides an overview evaluation of the height/density bonus proposal against the Guiding Principles. From this, we make several recommendations and also identify the areas of main concern, which are set out in detail in the subsequent Section 2.2 along with further recommendations.

2.1 THE EXECUTIVE PROPOSAL AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The "Executive Proposal" is contained in a Council Bill dated May 31, 2005, which includes changes in Downtown zoning and land use regulations. It consists of a detailed land use and zoning ordinance of close to 200 pages. It is supported by a number of documents, two of which have been particularly important in the evaluation. The first is the "Mayor's Recommendation", dated May 20, 2005, which contains a detailed summary of the proposed amendments. The second is the "Downtown Height and Density Changes - Final Environmental Impact Statement", dated January 2005, which contains detailed information about the preferred option that has been developed into the height/density bonus proposal.

The Guiding Principles were adopted by City Council on April 4, 2005 and embody specific intentions, preferences, and values to help define the framework for decisions related to developing the Downtown Urban Center.

The following are our comments about the height/density bonus proposal as it relates to the 10 Guiding Principles.

2.1.1 Consistency with the Seattle Comprehensive Plan and Adopted Neighborhood Plans

We do not have the information to evaluate if the height/density bonus proposal fulfills this principle.

2.1.2 Integration of Adjacent Neighborhoods and Urban Centers with the Downtown Urban Center

At face value, the height/density bonus proposal appears to create a land use transition between the Downtown Urban Centre and adjacent neighbourhoods. However, since integration has more to do with actual linkages, we do not have the information necessary to judge if such linkages are facilitated.

2.1.3 Provision of Sufficient Housing Capacity

The height/density bonus proposal appears to provide ample theoretical capacity to meet housing targets by quantity and the affordable housing fund should be greatly augmented. It should be emphasized, however, that capacity does not automatically translate into the actual delivery of housing and that housing estimates and targets are only relevant to delivery not capacity of housing. This is an important distinction for Seattle because targets for housing and jobs have been set, there is an imbalance of housing and jobs in the inner city, with housing delivery lagging behind commercial growth, and the spontaneous growth impetus at this time appears to be commercial. Accordingly, either as a part of the height/density bonus proposal or parallel to it, measures are needed to generally motivate housing development.

More particularly, we have concerns about the variety of housing that will occur and the quality of the residential areas that are created, especially as it relates to the provision of attractive residential neighbourhoods that will widely entice consumers.

Our concern is that it is not sufficient to provide solely for capacity to accommodate residential floor space. A housing market must also be engendered. To do this, conditions must be achieved that will create an attractive environment for living and a diversity of housing types, even in a mixed-use context, so that a variety of people will want to move there. This concern is described more fully in the next section.

2.1.4 Optimization of Use of Transportation Infrastructure

While we do not have the information or mandate to review this principle in detail we note that the encouragement of more housing is a positive strategy to alleviate travel-to-work demands to Downtown. In that respect, and as we describe in more detail later, the provision of a variety of

housing types to accommodate people who would otherwise choose to live in suburban locations, is another positive step that can be taken to meet this principle.

It is clearly a positive feature of the proposal that a bonus of 1 FAR density is provided for developments that accommodate access to the fixed rail transit system.

2.1.5 Region-wide Sprawl Reduction

Compared with many other cities, Seattle has a gross imbalance between commercial and residential uses in its Downtown. Encouraging residential development is therefore a positive feature of the height/density bonus proposal.

Generally, higher densities in central areas and the healthy mixture of residential and commercial uses will assist in reducing regional sprawl. However, it is important to attract a wide variety of people to live there. While single people and empty nesters are often the first people who will move into a dense urban core area, one of the challenges in counteracting regional sprawl is to provide attractive alternatives for many different kinds of households. Family households often believe they have no choice but to move to the suburbs. They will only be attracted to communities that have good schools, parks, child care facilities, services and community centers. These are the very households that make up most of the demand for urban sprawl. Therefore, these households should be targets for enticement back to the Urban Center. While the proposal shows considerable capacity for new high density housing it is desirable to add incentives and programs that foster family housing in the mixed-use areas, and will ensure the provision of community amenities. We also address these issues in the next section.

2.1.6 Promotion of Sustainable Development Practices

Sustainable development practices are inevitably moving into the mainstream of contemporary development in many cities. We applaud Seattle's leadership and particularly the furtherance of LEED certification reflected in the proposal. As a result of an on-going dialogue between municipal officials and the development industry in Vancouver, we are aware that as LEED grows in application, new measures and products are being identified. This is accompanied by increased availability in the

marketplace, bringing costs down. These factors are now being reflected in current LEED costing work and, contrary to common belief, real costs for green building elements are continuing to decrease relative to traditional material choices. With the exception of the administration, registration, and documentation fees associated with LEED, basic LEED Certification tends to be achieved within typical costing, LEED Silver has a modest premium, and LEED Gold is within the reach of many developments. With increased developer and designer awareness of green building methodologies and a variety of LEED Application Guides, LEED is broadening to more diverse building types. Given the declining cost increment, the general notion in Vancouver is that green buildings are an element of emerging best practices that should, over time, be a part of all development. Accordingly, we suggest that before formalizing an explicit incentive for LEED performance, that may be difficult to withdraw or adjust later, you pause to confirm how much of an incentive is necessary. A pro forma-based discussion with Seattle developers or an independent financial evaluation within the Seattle market context may be informative. Perhaps an incentive less than the 1.0 FAR now proposed will do the job. Also, you might consider a sunset clause for the measure. Ultimately we project that sustainable building practices will become the norm (they may even become part of the Building Code) and bonuses will no longer be needed. You should anticipate that.

As this matter will not be further discussed, the following is offered:

RECOMMENDATION

2.1.6.1 THAT the bonus for green building construction be reviewed to confirm to what extent it is financially necessary in the Seattle market (preferably less than the 1.0 FAR in the current proposal) and for how long the bonus will be needed.

2.1.7 Promotion of Historic Preservation

The improved TDR measures proposed to protect landmark buildings are very positive as are the additional incentives for conversion of landmark buildings into affordable housing.

Seattle's historic landmark buildings and districts contribute enormously to the attractiveness of Downtown Seattle. As redevelopment continues and building mass intensifies, the remaining historic buildings will be even

DOWNTOWN SEATTLE HEIGHT AND DENSITY REVIEW

more valued. They will help to provide the memory of the city's heritage and, by the nature of those architectural styles, provide additional variety and interest. They will add significantly to the perceived quality of the Downtown experience.

We were interested to note that the same incentives were not being offered in the adjacent historic districts. We have found in Vancouver that the use of bonuses and TDR have become key programs to protect our heritage districts from decline and demolition and to bring equity to those buildings to assist in restoration and revitalization. Even though, similar to Seattle, our heritage districts are formally designated, new incentives have been able to bring a new energy to those areas. We do not have the same federal and municipal tax incentives as Seattle, nor do we have such an extensive stock of heritage buildings, so there is not a direct comparison. We have been informed that the districts are healthy economically and preservation and improvement are taking place under existing programs. We do not make a recommendation on this item although we see the need for discussion about it with the heritage community where opinions vary.

The heritage preservation principle encourages an urban scale, form and character that respects and integrates historically significant structures and districts. We understand that because individual landmark buildings are dispersed in many different locations and urban contexts this principle is pursued typically, and usually successfully, through the historic and design review processes.

However, there are a number of older buildings that have valuable historic qualities that are not currently included among the identified landmark buildings. As Downtown land values are likely to increase significantly as a result of the higher densities and heights in the proposal, historic buildings will be at greater risk of demolition. It would be wise to update the historic buildings inventory soon to ensure that all valuable buildings are identified.

We also have some concerns about the juxtaposition of potential very tall buildings next to the historic districts. The unique ambience of historic districts can be disrupted by too close a presence of a dominating modern high-rise tower. The transition between the highest rises of the core and

the historic district should be carefully modulated. This suggests that some refinement to the proposed building heights is desirable in the areas adjacent the historic districts.

As these matters will not be further discussed, the following is offered:

RECOMMENDATION

2.1.7.1 THAT the inventory of historic buildings in Downtown be updated to ensure all valuable heritage structures are identified.

2.1.7.2 THAT urban design modeling-studies be undertaken to assess the impacts of potential new high-rise developments adjacent to the Historic Districts and that the proposed height limits be adjusted accordingly.

2.1.8 Maintenance and Promotion of Aesthetics in Design and Urban Form

We admire your design review processes and your excellent design guidelines and recognize that their thorough implementation is profound to ensuring good design in Seattle.

We recognize the improvements that will occur as a result of the new regulations that create taller and thinner towers, and applaud the measures to set maximum floor plate sizes, minimum setbacks between residential buildings and to modulate the facades of those towers. However, probably because we have become acclimatized to a generally lower density and height than Seattle, we find the overall affect of the higher densities and heights, particularly in the DOC 1 and DOC 2 areas, will still produce considerable overlook and shadowing on the adjoining streets. Continuous 85 ft. tall street walls topped by large floor plate, high-rise towers, with few setback requirements, provide significant urban design challenges.

We have additional concerns in the DMC zones that go beyond aesthetics and urban form and refer to the overall character of place and the resultant livability of those places. We will deal with these matters more thoroughly in the next section of this report.

2.1.9 Provision of Public Open Space and Urban Recreational Opportunities

We appreciate the efforts being made through “green streets” and open space bonus policies and recognize that supportive implementation strategies are important to their achievement. We are concerned that the provisions for open space and urban recreational facilities do not go far enough to satisfy the inevitable growing demands for these services when the capacity of the increased residential densities is taken up. We comment on this in more detail later.

2.1.10 Provision of Sufficient Employment Capacity

The proposal provides adequate capacity for employment growth.

2.2 SUMMARY

While Seattle’s goals and objectives emphasize the intent of enticing downtown residential development for a richly-mixed-use core and enhancing the quality of downtown development and the inner-city environment, we concluded that the primary thrust of the current proposal is to augment downtown development capacity and secure some important public goods (especially affordable housing) through an increased height and density initiative. We came to the conclusion that residential facilitation was not advanced because Seattle already allows unlimited density for housing and the current height/density bonus proposal does not include measures to secure an expected array of neighborhood services for people in residence that would make such development and consumption probable. Regarding enhancement of the community context and built form, we came to the conclusion that this was not advanced because no further guidelines for character, livability or public realm amenity are proposed (although the massing parameters are positive and will help manage the impacts of densification to some degree) and the height/density allowances are not tied to specific, detailed area plans conceived for the new uses that will now occur.

Nonetheless, in and of itself, the height/density bonus initiative is laudable and its implications for Seattle’s goals and objectives can be optimized by augmenting it with several other key supportive actions.

Our comparison of the height/density bonus proposal with Seattle’s Guiding Principles for inner-city change led to four broader subject areas that will be addressed more thoroughly in the next section. These areas focus on the quality and attractiveness of the built environments that can be expected as a result of the new regulations. Our premise

is a simple one. Whether residents are being invited into high density living in primarily residential settings, like the existing communities surrounding the study area (e.g., Belltown), or into mixed-use commercial/residential settings proposed within the study area (e.g., Denny Triangle), they will need support facilities and a quality place to live. For a strategy to be successful, it must deal with the attractiveness, functionality and livability of the neighborhoods being created. The goal is to create places where people will want to come to live as well as to work and play. Providing the capacity is one thing - that frames the opportunity; providing the quality of the spaces desired is another - that motivates the change to actually happen. These matters are further explored in the next section.

2.3 EXPLORING OTHER ISSUES

Our review has led us to a number of additional questions about the height/density bonus proposal that we believe should be explored. These are elaborated upon in the following four discussion areas.

2.3.1 DISCUSSION ONE

Are the goals of increasing the capacity of Downtown for housing and obtaining more affordable housing met? Will the plan provide for more people living downtown in vibrant healthy neighborhoods?

While the height/density bonus proposal sets out ways of financing affordable housing and child care facilities, obtaining additional areas of open space and creating residential enclaves along “green streets”, there are no incentives or guidelines that promote what we believe are essential design features and neighborhood-generating amenities. This is particularly important in the DMC zones where the plans are for significant residential growth. The concept of “concurrency”, long held in Seattle, is relevant here: to insure that there is adequate infrastructure in place as development occurs. The type of community infrastructure or amenities we are referring to are community centers, libraries, schools, passive and active parks, local shopping and service centers. Design features are needed that include a mixture of building scales to promote lower, more human-scaled street facades and continuous street activity with entries to housing, “eyes on the street” and a gradient between the private and public domains in the design of buildings and spaces. People will want light, air, privacy and a good aspect for their homes. We do not believe the private sector can produce all these features because they

DOWNTOWN SEATTLE HEIGHT AND DENSITY REVIEW

can only be described and obtained through a coordinated neighborhood plan that locates them and identifies ways to pay for them.

It is ironic that if the incentives for residential growth really succeed, Seattle could face a surge in residential construction and a demand for community facilities that will not be met because there are no plans or incentives tied to residential development. Alternatively, because there are no such facilities, the residential enclaves that start to emerge may be seen to be lacking in desired amenities and those areas will languish or fail to grow because they are not attractive to a broad enough range of the housing market.

One major component of a good community is the availability of usable open space. The higher the density the more important that space becomes for the well being of the residents. Open space is a major contributor to the enjoyment of neighborhoods. Residents need a minimum quantity of space to relax in, to play, cycle and walk in and to gather for organized games. These open spaces need to be planned for, financed through incentives or direct public investment, and developed in accessible locations in the future community. While many small spaces are very positive, several larger parks are also needed, preferably associated with neighborhood areas. The case of the Denny Triangle area is illustrative. Current park service boundaries indicate that most of the area is unserved. It would appear that a new centrally-located park is needed. This should be located, secured and developed as the area is occupied. This takes an explicit municipal strategy.

Similarly, schools are a significant component of a successful community and must be planned, financed and built in accessible places in the community.

Local stores and other services provide an essential service in the community and while many of these will be private initiatives their locations must be planned for and located where they will be convenient to local people.

We note that despite the already encouraging policies that allow residential development without density controls, little housing has

DOWNTOWN SEATTLE HEIGHT AND DENSITY REVIEW

occurred. We don't see what there is about the new policies that will now encourage the provision of more housing except for significant increases in affordable housing funding and larger building forms that can accommodate more housing.

We have found that to have an impact on regional sustainability we need to attract families to downtown living. Families will only come if they see that the housing suits their needs and that downtown neighborhoods include the community-generating facilities that they require for successful family life. This starts with the layout, bedroom count, flexibility, parking arrangements and finishes of the unit. It includes the play and child-minding provisions within the project as well as child-friendly and child-compatible project design. And it requires neighborhood qualities and facilities related to family need and use. Play and learning arrangements are key and safety and security are central concerns. Also, families need to know they are wanted, so private-sector based marketing to them and public-sector information targeting them is vital. The point is not to require family occupancy, which is neither legal nor practical, but to increase the probability that family households will make a housing choice in the area and move in of their own accord.

We believe it is important to develop specific plans and strategies that coordinate social, environmental and economic efforts towards creating whole residential neighborhoods with a sense of community.

Achieving design quality at the neighborhood level should not be difficult for Seattle because there is already in place an excellent design review system and regulatory framework that seems to have enough imperative to foster good design and enough flexibility to accommodate innovation. There is a solid framework articulating design expectations in the "Guidelines for Downtown Development" and other associated guidelines. There are also strong neighborhood plans that have been generated through a wide and rich public process that engaged local citizens as well as special interest groups. The "Denny Triangle Plan" is an example. The "Blue Ring Plan" is further informative in outlining how Seattle can augment and tie together its public open spaces within the core and connecting to the waterfront. To support the height/density bonus initiative and insure that resulting neighborhood areas are well structured for

residential occupancy in addition to commercial activity, it would be prudent to identify the specific neighborhood sub-areas that will likely see more housing within the downtown core (we project three areas: Denny Triangle, southeast edge of Belltown and between DOC 1 and the historic district to the south) and then review the neighborhood plans for these sub-areas. It would also be prudent to generate parallel strategic implementation schemes at the local level to secure the appropriate amenities in each sub-area. Tying the bonus program back into these strategies will facilitate their realization as people move into the new areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2.3.1.1 THAT the general “Guidelines for Downtown Development” be augmented with:

- a) guidelines for residential livability; and,**
- b) guidelines for family housing.**

2.3.1.2 THAT probable growth sub-areas for housing within the mixed-use neighborhoods in the Downtown (DMC areas) be identified, and that neighborhood plans, as they relate to these sub-areas, be reviewed to insure that each sub-area has the land-use structure to support residents, including:

- a) local shopping and commercial services capacity within about a five-minute walk, preferably in a “high street” form that might be associated with a “green street” alignment;**
- b) adequate public open space of a useable size that would likely be linked by “green streets”; and,**
- c) space allocated for typical neighborhood based facilities.**

2.3.1.3 THAT specific strategic programs be completed for each of the expected growth sub-areas for housing that outline at the neighborhood level the list of hoped for residential public amenities and how these will be delivered, through the bonus program or government investment or from other funding sources, acknowledging that not all such amenities are

deliverable within every neighborhood and that delivery may occur over time.

2.3.1.4 THAT consideration be given to coordinating the array of public goods achieved through the height/density bonus program with the neighborhood structure plans and amenities strategic programs.

2.3.1.5 THAT consideration be given to achieving housing suitable for families through application of zoning and its bonusing provisions as well as through other initiatives such as provision of children-support services, child-friendly design and dissemination of information regarding family households.

2.3.2 DISCUSSION TWO

Are the bonus provisions included in the plan adequate for the needs of the emerging downtown? Do the bonus provisions adequately share in the profits to be generated from the increased densities and heights?

Our experience has taught us that good economic analysis is needed to fully understand the public and private costs and benefits of zoning changes. This is vital when zoning changes involve bonuses for public goods because the value created by the zoning change may or may not support the public goods expected. Also, windfall value may be generated that could cover more or different public goods without impacting developability. This economic understanding comes from what is called pro forma analysis. Pro forma analysis is simply charting the expected costs and revenues of a project to ensure that a requisite level of profit can be achieved from the project and to determine what value is available to pay for the land because this is a variable when most other costs and sales prices are relatively fixed. Of course, different density and height allowances result in different residual land values, assuming fixed profit on the actual development, and it is through this variation that value is created that can be used to pay for public goods.

In Vancouver, we use pro forma analysis extensively and in two ways. One involves evaluation of a particular project, for which a developer must be willing to share proprietary information and from which a realistic

public goods expectation is then derived for that development. Because of the legal framework of Seattle, this approach may not be acceptable. An alternative pro forma approach focuses on a theoretical prototypical development for which only estimates and general market assumptions are used instead of information from any developer. This can be done in Seattle and would be very enlightening at a policy level so there is a ballpark understanding about land value changes with zoning changes. Specific bonus levels can then be closely calibrated with the costs of public goods.

The density and height increases set out in the Seattle proposal are substantial. While an array of bonusable items, especially affordable housing, is included, we have also identified the need to plan for and allocate additional community-oriented amenities such as parks, community centers and schools that are important to the creation of successful and attractive communities. The practicality of this, in policy terms, can be judged through pro forma analysis. We believe there may in fact be more potential in the land value increases from the new density and height regulations that could be used to finance more facilities, amenities and preferred qualities of development; or, alternatively, that the densities and heights might not need to go as far as proposed to cover the current array of public goods proposed.

The objective is to determine how much of the increased land value from rezoning can be shared for the purpose of improving the public realm and providing for facilities new residents and workers will need, without affecting developability or profitability for the developer.

RECOMMENDATION

2.3.2.1 THAT an economic evaluation be undertaken, using pro forma-based analysis, to estimate the increased value of prototypical expected development resulting from the new zoning regulations, and that new levels and types of bonusing be calibrated accordingly.

2.3.3 DISCUSSION THREE

How different will Downtown appear as a result of the new regulations?

We know that on a dark rainy day our northwestern locations provide considerable light reduction and can become quite gloomy. With significant densification and added height the new buildings will inevitably further reduce daylight penetration to street level. While the new maximum sized floor plates and the required separations between towers are helpful, we would note that in Vancouver, at lower heights and thinner floor plates than those suggested for Seattle, a growing number of people are concerned about the significant encroachment on our sense of comfort Downtown. This has also led us to seek lighter colored buildings to help to maintain reflected light levels.

In Vancouver we have restricted residential towers to floor plates of no greater than 6,800 sq ft and require a minimum spacing of 80 ft between residential towers. At our maximum densities, of about 5 FSR (acknowledging we have some spot zoned sites including housing at higher densities), and heights that do not generally exceed 300 feet, this produces a dense urban neighborhood where open space, light penetration, continuous townhouse entries along streets and view sharing are all major considerations. In Seattle, in the DMC zones, at densities of 7 or 10 FSR, building heights of 400 feet, floor plates around 10,000 sq ft and with 60 to 80 feet spacing between buildings, the new Seattle Downtown neighborhoods are going to feel much denser than the Vancouver Downtown neighborhoods. In addition, because residential and commercial buildings can be neighbors in the DOC and DMC zones, and commercial buildings are not subject to the set back or spacing requirements of the apartment towers, and floor plates in DOC 1 are much bigger, densities will feel even greater.

Unlike in Vancouver, where we typically see continuous street fronting developments of three or four storeys, or 40 to 50 feet, Seattle has no set back or spacing requirements up to 85 feet, and limited ones above that. Moreover, this is exacerbated by the absence of setback requirements for commercial buildings. We are aware that different communities accept different densities but we do stress that at the densities you are proposing it is doubly important that the massing and design of buildings are well conceived from the outset.

A further concern about the high densities and tower heights proposed is about what in Vancouver is called, “neighborliness”. A major objective of our development control processes is to ensure that buildings are good neighbors. This means that design guidelines concerning such things as privacy, overshadowing, sharing long and short views, sunlight and daylight access, street activity, architectural scale, the human compatibility of those floors close to grade and designs that bring “eyes on the street” are part of the approvals process. Without these considerations buildings can be located without concern for their impact on adjacent or nearby buildings. At the densities and heights proposed, loss of neighborliness could harm the overall desirability of the Downtown, especially for residential uses.

While higher densities bring activity and a sense of energy to a neighborhood there is a point when too much density simply overwhelms the remaining open areas between buildings. We have not been able to determine the full implications of this area of concern as it is a complex subject where developable lot size, street width, block size and relationship between existing buildings and potential variations on opportunities for development have to be drawn up and evaluated.

We are especially concerned about the juxtaposition of the new height and density limits where they impact adjacent, lower-scaled development. The northern and north western DMC 240/400, next to Denny Regrade, Belltown and Pike Place Market, and the DMC 340/400, next to Pioneer Square, need to be assessed to ensure that permitted development will not be overpowering and detract from the desired character of those areas.

While we see good modeling of individual buildings, we believe it is important that you model and study the impacts of the way several adjacent developments could impact each other and the overall effect the level of density and height will have on the streets. It may be that you will want to lower the 85 feet podium level heights or further reduce the floor plates and increase the spacing between buildings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2.3.3.1 THAT where densification can be anticipated, especially in DMC zones, area-wide modeling studies be undertaken to

obtain a wholistic view of tower patterning and scale, adjacencies and street-level conditions, and that massing guidelines be adjusted to respond to the findings.

2.3.3.2 THAT the “Guidelines for Downtown Development” be augmented with specific guidelines for neighborliness.

2.3.4 DISCUSSION FOUR

How will new and existing residents be involved in the development of specific neighborhood plans? How will they be involved in monitoring the new areas as they develop and help implement adjustments?

Conceptual plans set the stage for development and, if well done, deal with the basic implications and impacts of development. Nonetheless, as development occurs, the specific pattern requires constant monitoring and adjustment. Also, as residents move into the community they will begin to express their special needs that a good implementation process will want to incorporate. No plan is static and it is through this constant updating and refinement that a truly unique area character can emerge that is greater than the generalities envisaged in the initial plan. This is a municipal exercise and it is a residents' exercise and it is best undertaken in collaboration.

RECOMMENDATION

2.3.4.1 THAT arrangements be put in place to convene residents as they move into the new neighborhoods so they can input into an explicit municipal process for evolving area plans, policies and implementation.

3.0 CONCLUSION

Seattle is well positioned in its regulatory framework, process for reviewing development applications, corporate culture and tradition of public consultation to manage a complex policy framework that includes plans, policies, incentives and requirements. The link between development opportunity and provision of essential public goods, through a quid pro quo relationship, is well established. It appears to be understood by the development community and citizens.

DOWNTOWN SEATTLE HEIGHT AND DENSITY REVIEW

Seattle also has robust contemporary plans that articulate goals and objectives for urban change and a vision for how that change should occur. Of special note is that these plans have resulted from wide community involvement, so they will probably be stable over time.

Because of these factors, the Executive proposal for height and density increases tied to bonusing of public goods is viable and practical. We endorse its intentions and main thrust.

At the same time, the height/density bonus initiative goes only part way to achieving the goals and objectives Seattle has adopted and the principles for inner-city change as framed by the City Council. We offer suggestions to enhance the results.

At the heart of our recommendations are several simple propositions.

First, intensification of development and mixed-use in the core city are good. Contrary to popular sentiment, density is good. It benefits the environment, it makes public investment more efficient, it offers practical transportation alternatives to the private car and it stimulates culture. Mixed use is also good. It helps achieve a jobs/housing balance, it engenders 24-hour use of space, it maximizes convenience and it facilitates diversity. In this context, the height/density bonus proposal is supportable in principle, subject to it being implemented with an emphasis on quality.

Second, similar to Vancouver, the demographics of Seattle make it probable that there will be demand for Downtown housing. Downtown living can be accommodated in primarily residential settings or in diverse mixed-use settings. In either situation, residents have similar needs - they are looking for a community (albeit a highly energetic urban one in contrast to suburban options) not just a housing unit. They want public and private amenities to serve their day-to-day needs. They want an ambiance conducive to living. They want connections to preferred destinations. From this perspective, the height/density bonus system must also include parallel provisions to achieve the support and quality that people will expect. Otherwise, the City will achieve height and density in commercial use and the key goal of drawing people back to the city will remain unfulfilled.

Third, quality of life and livability do not just happen by accident nor are they assured through the spontaneous development process. In contemporary society they have to be motivated by municipal action – plans, guidelines, policies and approval processes. In

DOWNTOWN SEATTLE HEIGHT AND DENSITY REVIEW

part this is because of what drives development decisions in a private market economy - surely designers are seldom in the driver's seat. In part this is because any one developer cannot achieve the community-wide qualities that are key to satisfying urban design. Accordingly, as development opportunities are created by a municipality, a great deal of care and attention also has to be paid to a strong framework of livability, neighborliness, attractiveness, and overall community structure. Given this reality, the height/density bonus proposal must be coupled with strong design review backed up with the appropriate urban design documentation, that is articulated as clearly as possible and that is respected in all situations.

Fourth, a quid pro quo system for accepting public goods as high-density development opportunities are offered is especially prone to misfit between the values offered and received. Two results can be expected unless calibrations are carefully handled. Windfall profits can accrue without general understanding that that has occurred; and excess density has to be created and tolerated beyond what might be necessary for the amenities secured. A height/density bonus system as proposed must be fully understood and modeled from a financial angle. Also, a judgment must be made about what features and qualities should be expected as an integral part of any development as compared to what aspects require special incentives.

A good correlation was found between Council's Guiding Principles and the Executive Proposal. Our review identified a number of improvements through which we believe the principles could be better met or where the principles could be expanded. These mainly relate to ensuring that the quality of the resulting built environment is attractive to future occupants, especially where it applies to the creation of attractive residential neighborhoods.

The height/density bonus proposal is well conceived but its specific provisions might be adjusted to optimize civic objectives by:

- careful calculation of values accrued by rezoning as compared to cost of public goods;
- consideration of bonuses vs. requirements;
- inclusion of neighborhood-based amenities among the list of bonusable amenities;
- inclusion of provisions targeted to historic districts;
- consideration of being more directive in what is bonused on a case-by-case basis to achieve pre-determined local area plans; and,

DOWNTOWN SEATTLE HEIGHT AND DENSITY REVIEW

- consideration to the stream of amenities that will be secured as development shifts from commercial to residential projects.

The height/density bonus proposal will better serve Seattle if it is also matched by parallel initiatives that secure the quality of development the City aspires to achieve, including:

- augmented design guidelines;
- zoning provisions to foster family housing;
- area-based structure plans; and,
- area-based amenity implementation programs.

On this basis, the initiative should prove to be a powerful tool to shape development to fulfill the image that Seattle has of itself for the future.

DOWNTOWN SEATTLE HEIGHT AND DENSITY REVIEW

APPENDIX A

SEATTLE DOCUMENTS LIST

1. DIRECTOR'S RULE 11.93
Design Guidelines/Implementation Process for Designated
Green Street Nov 1993
2. DIRECTOR'S RULE 20.93
Public Benefit Features (Bonus and TDR) Jan 1994
3. DENNY TRIANGLE NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN
Denny Triangle Neighborhood Planning Committee Sept 1998
4. SEATTLE COMMERCIAL CORE
Neighborhood Plan Land Use and Urban Design Summary
City of Seattle Strategic Planning Office Feb 1999
5. DOWNTOWN URBAN CENTER
Plan Summary Feb 1999
6. DESIGN REVIEW GUIDELINES FOR DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT
City of Seattle Dept. of Design, Construction and Land Use April 1999
7. THE DOWNTOWN SEATTLE PLAN
City Interdepartmental Team Adopted by City Council May 1999
8. SEATTLE VIEW PROTECTION POLICIES
Volume One
Department of Design, Construction and Land Use April 2002
9. SEATTLE VIEW PROTECTION POLICIES
Volume Two
Department of Design, Construction and Land Use April 2002
10. SEATTLE VIEWS
An Inventory of 86 Public Views
Department of Design, Construction and Land Use May 2002
11. THE BLUE RING
Seattle's Open Space Strategy for the Center City June 2002
12. SEATTLE'S TRANSFERABLE DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS (TDR)
AND HOUSING BONUS PROGRAM
Seattle Office of Housing 2003

DOWNTOWN SEATTLE HEIGHT AND DENSITY REVIEW

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|---|-----------------|
| 13. SEATTLE'S COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
Towards a Sustainable Seattle B10 Downtown | Jan 2005 |
| 14. CITY OF SEATTLE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
Readers Guide, Department of Planning and Development | Jan 2005 |
| 15. DOWNTOWN HEIGHT AND DENSITY CHANGES
Final Environmental Impact Statement
City of Seattle Dept of Planning and Development | Jan 2005 |
| 16. SHAPING DOWNTOWN SEATTLE
Downtown Zoning Changes (brochure) | Jan 2005 |
| 17. CENTER CITY SEATTLE
Livable..walkable...24/7
Center City Seattle Project | April 2005 |
| 18. RESOLUTION 30759
Guiding Principles re Changes to Downtown Plans | April 2005 |
| 19. SHAPING DOWNTOWN SEATTLE
Proposed Downtown Zoning Changes (brochure)
City of Seattle Dept of Planning and Development | May 2005 |
| 20. DOWNTOWN ZONING ORDINANCE
Final Document - Version 2 | May 31, 2005 |
| 21. MAYORS RECOMMENDATIONS
Center City Strategy | May 20, 2005 |
| 22. EXISTING LAND USE
City of Seattle Downtown Urban Center | Rec'd June 2005 |
| 23. SEATTLE CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT
OFFICE REPORT 2005
Downtown Seattle Association, sponsored by
City of Seattle Office of Economic Development | Rec'd July 2005 |
| 24. PARKS: PROXIMITY REQUIREMENTS
City of Seattle | Rec'd July 2005 |

DOWNTOWN SEATTLE HEIGHT AND DENSITY REVIEW

APPENDIX B

SEATTLE CONTACT LIST

* Attended Vancouver Tour May 27 2005.

Met in Seattle June 24/25 2005.

% Other communications.

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DOWNTOWN SEATTLE HEIGHT AND DENSITY REVIEW

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APPENDIX C

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

PROMOTION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES

- 2.1.6.1 THAT the bonus for green building construction be reviewed to confirm to what extent it is financially necessary in the Seattle market (preferably less than the 1.0 FAR in the current proposal) and for how long the bonus will be needed.

PROMOTION OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

- 2.1.7.1 THAT the inventory of historic buildings in Downtown be updated to ensure all valuable heritage structures are identified.
- 2.1.7.2 THAT urban design modeling-studies be undertaken to study the impacts of potential new high-rise developments adjacent to the Historic Districts and that the proposed height limits be adjusted accordingly.

DISCUSSION ONE

- 2.3.1.1 THAT the general “Guidelines for Downtown Development” be augmented with:
- a) guidelines for residential livability; and,
 - b) guidelines for family housing.
- 2.3.1.2 THAT probable growth sub-areas for housing within the mixed-use neighborhoods in the Downtown (DMC areas) be identified, and that neighborhood plans, as they relate to these sub-areas, be reviewed to insure that each sub-area has the land-use structure to support residents, including:
- a) local shopping and commercial services capacity within about a five-minute walk, preferably in a “high street” form that might be associated with a “green street” alignment;
 - b) adequate public open space of a useable size that would likely be linked by “green streets”; and,
 - c) space allocated for typical neighborhood based facilities.
- 2.3.1.3 THAT specific strategic programs be completed for each of the expected growth sub-areas for housing that outline at the neighborhood level the list of hoped for residential public amenities and how these will be delivered, through the bonus program or government investment or from other funding

DOWNTOWN SEATTLE HEIGHT AND DENSITY REVIEW

sources, acknowledging that not all such amenities are deliverable within every neighborhood and that delivery may occur over time.

2.3.1.4 THAT consideration be given to coordinating the array of public goods achieved through the height/density bonus program with the neighborhood structure plans and amenities strategic programs.

2.3.1.5 THAT consideration be given to achieving housing suitable for families through application of zoning and its bonusing provisions as well as through other initiatives such as provision of children-support services, child-friendly design and dissemination of information regarding family households.

DISCUSSION TWO

2.3.2.1 THAT an economic evaluation be undertaken, using pro forma-based analysis, to estimate the increased value of prototypical expected development resulting from the new zoning regulations, and that new levels and types of bonusing be calibrated accordingly.

DISCUSSION THREE

2.3.3.1 THAT where densification can be anticipated, especially in DMC zones, area-wide modeling studies be undertaken to obtain a wholistic view of tower patterning and scale, adjacencies and street-level conditions, and that massing guidelines be adjusted to respond to the findings.

2.3.3.2 THAT the “Guidelines for Downtown Development” be augmented with specific guidelines for neighborliness.

DISCUSSION FOUR

2.3.4.1 THAT arrangements be put in place to convene residents as they move into the new neighborhoods so they can input into an explicit municipal process for evolving area plans, policies and implementation.